

critical digest

Vol. III No. 1

September 4, 1950

The Weekly That Keeps You Informed of the Current Broadway Critical Scene

Festival Theatre Folds

Fourth two week bill of Festival Theatre, which was scheduled to open September 4th at the Fulton, has been cancelled. Third offering, Lynn Riggs' Borned in Texas, was withdrawn after the first week. Repertory group headed by Sam Wanamaker, Teresa Hayden and Harriett Ames asked critics how their group could be improved. The answer was simple and had been repeated in all of the reviews. Pick better plays. But management's answer was that plays selected were minor classics which deserved production. Coleman, Mirror, praised the group for making "strawhatting" painless, but the remainder felt the fine efforts of the cast and director should have been used on better material.

Two Weekly Reviewers Rate the New Comedy

The Live Wire-Playhouse, 8/17/50. Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, and George Jean Nathan, Journal American, blamed author-director Garson Kanin for failure of his new comedy produced by Mike Todd to make the grade. The former thought Kanin lacked the conviction of his original idea, while the latter critic charged Kanin with trying to write "popular" theatre. It is the unpopular, the unpredictable that is successful today, Nathan explains.

Summer Theatre Tryouts

Theatre Guild tryout of Arnold Schulman's My Fiddle's Got Three Strings was saluted by Deul, Variety, after its Westport, Conn. premiere. J. Edward Bromberg plays the leading role of a cabbie, Lee Strasberg directed. Dialogue and character analysis of author was praised...Ouida Bergere's The Vicious Circle, shown at Mountainhome, Pa. starts out slowly, but develops into a silver cord theme drama with a new twist, comments Lama, Variety. John O'Shaughnessy directed a fine cast...Norman Ford's The Man Who Grew Younger was marked down as a disappointing one man show by Medo, Variety, when it was viewed at Ford's Verbank, N.Y. Theatre...Young and Pagano's new comedy The Homeward Look was granted slim Broadway possibilities after its Hartford, Conn. debut by Eck, Variety.

Critics and Dentists

Critics don't have the final authority over a show's prospects, though they have a material effect on it. Sheaffer, Eagle, presented the arguments he used in defending his profession with his dentist. The public, Variety survey showed, uses reviews as a guide, not as absolute judgement. Critics don't get together to decide a play's fate. Each arrives at his opinion individually. Critics like more plays than the public supports. Finally Sheaffer cited Leland Hayward's recent praise of the N.Y. critics. Satisfied, doctor?

Trade Journal Editorials

"Billboard" front page editorial rallies show business to wake up to the real threat of Communism. Complete list of all subversive groups is printed. Readers are warned not to do any benefits for groups named...Theatre News Weekly praises Joshua Logan's abstaining from his due royalties in The Wisteria Trees as a fine example of "enlightened self interest." Such action paves the way toward enlisting the support of the American people for the theatre.

' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

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| 1. NY Times | 11. Newark News | 21. Catholic World |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 12. Women's Wear Daily | 22. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 13. Daily Worker | 23. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 14. Wall Street Journal | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass (PM, Star) | 15. Journal of Commerce | 25. Sat.Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post | 16. George Jean Nathan | 26. Newsweek |
| 7. NY Sun (Morehouse) | 17. Morning Telegraph | 27. Time |
| 8. NY Journal American | 18. Variety | 28. Nation |
| 9. NY World-Telegram & Sun | 19. Billboard | 29. New Republic |
| 10. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Theatre Arts | 30. New Yorker |

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 2-9-13-14-22-25-29.
So-So: 16-30.

The Consul-Barrymore, 3/15/50. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 23. So-So: 6-29.

Death of a Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. So-So: 27.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-21-28.
So-So: 16-19-22-23-27. None: 25.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 5-6-7-20-26-27-28-30.
None: 13.

Kiss Me, Kate-Shubert, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. None: 28.

The Live Wire-Playhouse, 8/17/50. Pro: 3-4-5-10-11-12. Con: 2-6-8-14-16-18-23-24-26-27-30.
So-So: 1-15-17-19.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 16. So-So: 2-22-30.

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 21-24. So-So: 13-16-17.

Peep Show-Winter Garden. 6/28/50. Pro: 4-5-6-8-10-11-15-17-19-23. Con: 1-2-12-16-20-26-27-28-29-30. So-So: 3-14-18.

Peter Pan-Imperial, 4/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 8-13-16-30. So-So: 6-14-19.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 27. So-So: 23.

Texas Li'l Darlin'-Hellinger, 11/25/49. Pro: 12 votes. Con: 1-4-7-8-18-19-23-29-30. So-So: 2-5-10-11-20-26-27. None: 25-28.

Where's Charley?-St. James, 10/11/48. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-25-26. So-So: 4-27. None: 10-28.

The Visteria Trees-Martin Beck, 3/29/50. Pro: 15 votes. Con: 2-7-9-10-13-16-22-23-25-26-27-28-30. So-So: 18-29.

Tickets Please!-Coronet, 4/27/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 11-16-27-30. So-So: 26

AIR CONDITIONED???...A law compelling legitimate theatre owners to keep their cooling systems in operation until the final curtain was suggested by Kilgallen, Journal American. Now many theatres turn it off in the middle of the first act when it's too late for the suckers to demand their money back. Movie patrons get a much better deal.

DEFENDS FIRST NIGHTERS...The opening night clan is an actor's best friend, not his enemy. So thinks Chapman, News, in rebuttal to Victor Jory's recent blast in a Variety interview. It is true they have high critical standards, but they are "fast in the head" and immediately appreciative of something that is good. Besides, they are extra polite and leave quietly when something is bad.

TAXIS & THEATRES...Drama can take place in the taxicab, Coleman, Mirror, discovered. Enroute to a show he learned that his driver had a problem that needed a solution. The driver's oldest son was called to duty by the National Guard, while the youngest was called to his draft board. The wife was an invalid. Coleman found that the National Guard group contained Americans of all ranks and races. He couldn't solve the driver's problems, but he won a renewed faith in America and the Americans who fight for their country.

IN THE ACT...Morehouse, World-Telegram & Sun, traveling in a quick two week trip of South America met a full-fledged drama critic in Lima, Peru, a town where there is no theatre.

CRITIC'S VACATION...Aside from a busman's holiday to several summer stock companies, Watts, Post, spent his vacation reading. Conrad, Balzac, Fielding, Scott, Cooper, Standhal, Shaw and C.A. Henty were some of the authors he read for the second time. His favorite was Fielding's "Tom Jones" because of the many scenes which bring the reader in close contact with the theatre.

CROWD ARTISTS..."Extras" have been placed in the class of artist by such plays as Mister Roberts and Carousel comments "The Stage." Director and actors in these plays must express personality and temperament of certain kind of crowd to hold the attention of the audience. Each individual in the crowd is a segment of the total effect the author hoped to achieve.

THEATRE DOWN UNDER...Australian theatre is the reverse of Broadway, actress Adele Longmire writes to Variety. She played several cities in A Streetcar Named Desire. The critics panned the show, but the audiences attended in droves. Critics are ignored, shows run in spite of them. Any play that opens is sure to run long enough to make a profit. There is no excitement of a new season or new plays. Only professional theatre people are the managers, every one else is imported from England and the United States.

FUN'S FUN...If GBS does appear on TV, as has been rumored, Bill Bertolotti thinks the ten inch tube will be a "Beard's Eye View, for there is no business like Shaw business"...Bernie Hart suggests Rodgers-Hammerstein new musical Anna and the King of Siam might be called "Babes in Thailand"...Blame these two gags on O'Brian, Journal American.

RECORD ALBUMS...Hammond, music critic of Compass, highly recommends Decca's Death of a Salesman, but he warned that Decca's Carmen Jones is of poor record quality.

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' Summer Theatres '
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Oxford University Players production of King Lear at Master Institute Theatre, N.Y.C. overcame the handicaps of a small theatre and a warm auditorium, comments Shanley, Times. He thought players have brought good will to American theatre as well as having demonstrated their exceptional qualifications for the theatre.

Two New Jersey summer theatres won the compliments of Rice, Post. Ivy Tower Playhouse at Spring Lake, run by Dr. Rea Powers and his wife, is in its second year and thriving. They are now asking patrons the plays they would like to see next year. Cast and staff don't have the phony "one big happy family" air, but they do seem to enjoy working together... Hunterdon Hills Playhouse at Jutland has always been a favorite on Rice's summer circuit. This year the Cort Players, a group of strolling players, run the theatre at \$1.00 top. The group is so worth while he would like to see them do a regular play instead of melodramas.

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' Interview Round Up '
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BILL TALBERT... South Pacific junior lead entered MBS Sardis long run sweepstakes with a bet that his musical will run longer than Oklahoma. His western song "On Rainbow Trail" is doing nicely, and is receiving many plugs on radio and TV. The young singer, who just bought a house in the suburbs, learned that he is very apt at plumbing.

IRENE WORTH... The Cocktail Party lead, now in London, faced the unusual experience of facing her fourth first night in the same play she told "The Stage". Each of the four premieres was a nerve shattering ordeal. She fears that theatregoers in their effort to understand the Eliot play read more into the script than the author intended. Theatregoers can only hope to take from a play what they put in. They should not rely on outside guidance and advice.

LOUIS SOBOL... King Features columnist detailed life of a paragraph compiler to WNBC Hi Jinx before going to California for his marriage. He goes out on the town every night, attending all the theatre openings and stopping at a half dozen night clubs. His writing career started as a second string drama reviewer on the Graphic. He covered the plays Winchell was barred from at the Shubert theatres.

CHERYL CRAWFORD... Producer plans busy season starting with Paul Green's adaptation of Peer Gynt with John Garfield in the lead. Coleman, Mirror, learned that she considers the critics who crusaded for Regina should be placed in the class of Wolcott and Brown as enthusiasts willing to fight for something better than run-of-the-mill stuff.

JOEY FAYE... Comedian just returned from St. Louis Municipal Opera told MBS Sardis that N.Y.C. should have a similar outdoor theatre. He played in The Desert Song and Of Thee I Sing before audiences of 12,000. Faye suggested N.Y.C. might put a stage up in Central Park and go into production.

JOHN ROSENFELD... Drama critic of "Dallas News" helped the career of many glamour girls he recalled on WNBC Hi Jinx. He published the first publicity picture of Ginger Rogers in 1926. One of his prizes is a photo with the note "Dear Mr. Rosenfeld, Please run this picture again. If you do I will never ask you to run another."

